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ABSTRACT

Efforts to reform and improve the nation's schools have encountered serious roadblocks, often in the form of parental opposition. This document describes findings of a study that investigated parents' expectations of America's public schools. Data were derived from a national telephone survey with over 1,100 Americans, including 550 White, African-American, and traditional Christian parents of children currently in public school. Focus groups were also conducted with parents of public school children in four cities. A majority of the parents: (1) believed that public schools did not provide a safe, orderly environment and teaching of "the basics"; (2) believed higher standards to be insufficient; (3) distrusted teaching innovations; (4) seemed to want a "new, improved" version of traditional education; (5) were not preoccupied by concerns about sex education and multiculturalism; (6) agreed on the need for values education that stresses tolerance and equality; (7) supported public schools' role in sex education, but were sharply divided over abortion, homosexuality, and premarital sex; and (8) expressed a wavering trust in the decision-making abilities of educators. Although traditional Christian parents shared most concerns about public education with other parents, they were especially concerned about sex education and religious issues. African-American parents shared similar concerns with other American parents, but expressed dissatisfaction with their local schools' performance, supported more candid sex education, and reported concerns about negative stereotypes in textbooks and curricula. Thirteen tables are included. (LMI)

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